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THE JOY OF FINDING

Or, GOD'S HUMANITY AND MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN

AN EXPOSITION OF LUKE xv. 11–32

BY

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PRINCIPAL OF NEW COLLEGE, LONDON

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"INTER omnes Christi parabolas haec sane eximia est, plena affectum et pulcherrimis picta coloribus!"

GROTIUS.

I.

WHAT IS THE PARABLE?

CHAPTER I.

WHAT IS THE PARABLE?

"Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them."—LUKE XV. 1–3 (A.V.).

"Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him for to hear him. And both the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake unto them this parable."—(R.V.)

THE common title of the parable *The Prodigal Son* is misleading, as the centre of interest in the parable is not the son who left home at all, but the contrast between the attitude of the father and the elder brother to him on his return; and this contrast I have sought to express in the longer sub-title chosen for this volume, *God's Humanity and Man's Inhumanity to Man*, while the

briefer title indicates the common thought of the three parables in the chapter. The occasion that the evangelist who alone records the parable gives to it confirms this view. Jesus is defending Himself against the charge of "keeping bad company," and His answer is that His attitude, and not His critics', corresponds to God's.

1. The Companion Parables.

The two companion parables which the evangelist assigns to the same occasion are also a defence of Jesus' care for sinners; but the point of comparison is not exactly the same. The emphasis in each is on sorrow in the loss and joy in the recovery of *one* of many possessions, one sheep out of a hundred, and one coin out of ten.

The value of the individual soul is emphasised as a reason for the endeavour to seek and save even the socially outcast, the morally depraved, and the religiously indifferent. As the point of comparison is not the same, it is doubtful whether the three parables were spoken at the same time.

The evangelist's method of composition does not necessitate any such assumption, as in this part of the Gospel he is not following any distinct chronology, and is often grouping his material according to the subjects. If this be so, then it is evident how unwise it is to treat the three parables as they have been treated, as complementary to illustrate the function of the three persons of the Trinity in man's salvation, the shepherd as the Son, the woman as the Spirit, and the father in the parable as God the Father. It is certain that the doctrine of the Trinity was not in the mind of Jesus, and that such a distribution of functions is remote from the realm of moral and spiritual reality in which He moved. The parable of the Lost Sheep is found in Matthew's Gospel also (xviii. 12–13), and then in a still more appropriate setting as illustrating the reason why "the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost" (ver. 11),[1] namely, that "it is not the will of your Father, which is in heaven, that one

[1] This verse is omitted by the R.V., and it may be an insertion here from Luke xix. 10.

of these little ones should perish" (ver. 14). The companion parable of the Lost Coin is peculiar to Luke; but it need not, because mentioned by one evangelist only, on that account be regarded as unauthentic; it does not bring out any fresh aspect of the subject; but Jesus for the sake of emphasis may have presented the same truth in two different forms. The parable which we are studying so bears the impress of the spirit and purpose of Jesus that we need have no hesitation about its authenticity.

There is one thought found in the three parables: their common refrain is, lost and found. It is of interest and importance that we should clearly see and firmly grasp the truth Jesus would teach. When we think of sin as loss, we think of what it costs the sinner. From this point of view we might regard the three parables as teaching the loss of sin to man as danger, as disuse, as disappointment; and each of these is true as an aspect of human experience. But this is not the standpoint of Jesus. He feels the sorrow, shame, and suffering of sin

as our brother; but in His judgment of sin He sees it as the Son of God. It is the shepherd, not the sheep, who sorrows and rejoices; the woman, not the coin; the father assuredly more than the son. It is the loss of sin to God on which He who knew the heart of God lays all the stress. It is heaven's, and not earth's, joy and sorrow with which He is concerned, because He shares it. Jesus does not represent God—as Christian theology, following pagan philosophy for centuries, insisted on describing Him—as impassible. What was a nickname of heresy in the third century was for Jesus the truth about God, which was the motive of the ministry: He was a *patripassian*;[1] for Him it was no monstrous heresy to represent the infinite and eternal God as so loving man as to feel man's sin as a loss, and to rejoice in man's recovery.

[1] The Patripassians taught that Father, Son, and Spirit were successive modes of God; and were accordingly charged with teaching that the Father suffered on the Cross.

2. The Significance of the Details.

It is very properly insisted that the parables are not allegories, but that each is a complete and consistent story illustrative of one point. The point illustrated by the parable has already been indicated : Christ's attitude to sinners, and not the Pharisees', corresponds to God's, because God rejoices in the recovery of the lost. But this canon of interpretation cannot be applied rigidly to this parable. Christ's elaboration of the narrative shows that it had an interest for Him in its details ; for here the truth illustrated and the tale illustrating are not accidentally associated ; there is an essential identity. It is the story of a sinner told to show that God treats sin as a loving father does ; and so all the details are significant, and we can without any forced ingenuity regard the parable as giving us Jesus' view of God and man, sin and judgment, repentance and forgiveness, the bliss and the woe of the soul. There is suggested to us in this parable the content of the Gospel of Jesus ;

and in the exposition of it we need not confine ourselves to what is explicitly stated, but may from the other teachings of Jesus illustrate and complete what is implicitly suggested. In so doing we have, however, to be careful to distinguish in our own minds what is stated and what is suggested, and to avoid a confusion in our exposition. On the one hand, it must be maintained that in the study of any portion of Scripture we may allow ourselves to follow the lead of suggestion, and need not confine ourselves to the narrower path of statement, so long as we keep the distinction clearly before us, and accept only such suggestion as is accordant with the statement of any passage. We must not give as the exegesis of a passage thoughts that in our minds spring out of, because they are rooted in, the truth that is taught; but we must not refuse to allow our minds to go beyond the direct teaching of a passage, so long as these thoughts are controlled by that truth, and bring into association with it truths that are elsewhere taught in the Scriptures.

3. The Interpretation Through the Mind of Jesus.

In dealing with the teaching of Jesus we may supplement one saying by other sayings from His lips, for we may be sure that for His mind truth was a unity, and in so doing we are only seeking to recover that unity for our own minds. The writer ventures to labour this point, as there is a pedantic scholarship that disregards the interests of living piety in its exposition of the Scriptures. All exposition of the Scriptures must be consistent with, but it need not be confined by, scholarship. We may bring the whole mind of Christ to bear on each of the sayings of Jesus for its adequate interpretation. This does not mean that we allow freedom to a vagrant fancy or to a wilful dogmatism; but that we see each part of the New Testament in the light of the whole Gospel of which it is the shrine. The more at home we are in the New Testament as a whole, the more will each passage we study legitimately suggest the truth to our minds.

We must, however, in dealing with this parable especially avoid the common assumption that it is, or claims to be, a complete statement of the Gospel. Because there is no mention of the atoning sacrifice of Christ Himself in the parable, it is sometimes very arrogantly declared that this evangelical doctrine lacks the authority of Christ. It would be beyond the purpose of this volume to offer the abundant evidence there is elsewhere in the New Testament for the significance and value of that doctrine for Christian faith, or even to quote the sayings of Jesus Himself which confirm the Apostolic Gospel. It is sufficient here to insist that a parable, however rich in suggestion, is not a system of theology; and the silence of a parable about a doctrine does not and cannot involve its exclusion from the Gospel. It is true that any view of the atoning sacrifice that represents God as other than the Father who seeks the recovery of His lost son is inconsistent with this parable, and so must be rejected as contradicting the Son's testimony. It may be demanded that evangelical doctrine

shall not be inconsistent with the representation of God given in this parable; but only a caricature of the true teaching about the Atoning Sacrifice can be made to appear inconsistent. As will be shown in the subsequent exposition, there is implicit in the Father's sorrow for the loss of His son, and in His forgiveness of the penitent that atoning sacrifice, for to know sin and to know forgiveness is to know also the Cross.

II.

WHAT IS GOD?

CHAPTER II.

WHAT IS GOD?

"And he said, A certain man had two sons."—LUKE XV. 11.

IT has already been pointed out that there is a much closer connection between the truth taught and the tale told than in most other parables; and the use of the illustration by Jesus shows that He regarded the human affections, and the actions of which they are the motives, as evidences of what God Himself is. When in the title we venture to assert God's Humanity, we are not going at all beyond the warrant of Jesus' teaching. The analogy between the earthly father's and the Heavenly Father's actions assumes the affinity of the nature of God and man. The entire teaching of Jesus about God is summed up in the name Father; God is

what man at his best would be. We have then the confirmation of the whole revelation of God in and by Christ when from the words of the parable, "A certain man had two sons," we draw two truths: (1) *God is manlike;* (2) *God is fatherly.*

1. God is Manlike.

(1) Herbert Spencer tells us that the ultimate reality is an inscrutable mystery; that religion and science can be reconciled only in the recognition of the Unknowable. Matthew Arnold could not discover more than "a power not ourselves that makes for righteousness." Even idealism to-day often hesitates about assigning to God personality, as personality is often conceived as necessarily finite, and so unpredicable of the Infinite. And one of the commonest charges against Christian theology is that it is *anthropomorphic* or *anthropopathic*, that it assigns human form or human passions to God. It need hardly be said that Christian faith is not anthropomorphic, as idolatry is; we may in the imaginative language of devotion

speak of God as hearing, seeing, speaking; but we do not mean that God has ears, eyes, or mouth; for Jesus has taught us that God is Spirit. Neither is it anthropopathic in the sense that it ascribes to God any animal passions, as pagan mythology did; for He is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all. No human imperfection attaches to God in the Christian conception. But, on the other hand, if we use the term passion in the sense of suffering, in which there is no moral defect, the Christian faith can be said to be anthropopathic. It has already been pointed out that when Christian theology used the term *Patripassian* as a term of reproach, it showed its departure from the standpoint of Jesus. He did, and we may, assign to God emotion and affection, love and the sorrow or the joy that love brings as it is disappointed or satisfied. It is about the ascription of feeling to God that most difficulty has been felt. The existence of the Universe demands an infinite and eternal will as its cause; the law and order and progress of that Universe demand that that

cause shall be an intelligent cause, that an infinite and eternal Mind shall be allied with an infinite and eternal Will.

There is more doubt and dispute as to whether that Mind and Will may be regarded also as beneficent in view of the evil that is in the world. Even when, in spite of that evil, beneficence is admitted, and affection and emotion are so far conceded as conceivable in God, there is often reluctance in taking the next step, the admission that the Infinite and Eternal Mind and Will is also a Heart that not only wills good to His creatures, but sorrows with them in the evil that they experience. Jesus in this parable and throughout His teaching boldly takes that step. The God He reveals as Father sorrows with man's loss, and rejoices in man's recovery. He is manlike in the full sense of the word man; He thinks, wills, feels, and loves.

(2) As this is not a theological treatise the philosophical problem of the ascription of personality to God cannot here be discussed, but two reasons for accepting Jesus'

view which appeal to the religious consciousness may be given. In *the first place*, religion for its reality demands that God shall be conceived personal as man is personal. The mind needs to hold communion not with an impersonal truth, even if we could attach any meaning to such a phrase, but with another Mind that thinks the truth. The heart calls out, not for a spirit of love, whatever that abstraction may be, but for a Heart that can give and receive love. The conscience cannot bow before an abstract law, but in that law it must discern the authority of a perfect moral subject, not only inspiring righteousness in men, but realising it Himself.

As Eucken has recently been insisting, in religion at its intensest, personality craves, and can be satisfied only with personality. It is not imperfect personality as man knows himself to be, but personality in which all the ideals after which he strives are reality; personality that in its perfection gives the assurance that man shall yet as personal be perfected. To ask men to confess and

worship the Unknown is to mock them; and Spencer in making the demand showed that he did not know what religion really is. Even in the lowest forms of savage religion—*animism*—man has sought the likeness of himself in the divine; and the progress of religion lies not in depersonalising God, but in conceiving the ideal of human personality more worthily, and so ascribing the reality of it more worthily to God.

In *the second place*, if Jesus is to be accepted as a revelation of God at all, God must be thought manlike. If God be impersonal, how can the personal reveal Him; and yet the firm foundation of all Christian faith is that God is what Christ showed Him to be not only in the words of His lips, but in His whole life. Incarnation crowns the religious development of mankind, if God be personal, for in Christ man at last finds the perfect personality that he sought, and so finds God in Him; but, if God be not personal, then man's religious consciousness has been deceptive at every stage; and such a conception as Incarnation of the divine is

an illusion. Only if God be manlike can He have become man in Jesus Christ.

2. God is Fatherly.

(1) But Jesus is not content with assuming manlikeness to God. He describes Him as Father. What does that term connote? It does not mean merely that God is Creator of man, that man depends on God for the origin and the continuance of his existence; for that can be affirmed of God in relation to the whole Universe. It is not merely an assertion of the affinity of nature between God and man, that God may be thought manlike, for God made man godlike. All religion implies this likeness, and the fellowship which arises therefrom. If God had not made man mind, heart, will, as He Himself is, man had never known God, or sought any relation with Him. It is not, however, in this wider sense, which to some modern thinkers seems to be the only sense, that Jesus uses the term Father. It expresses the relation of God to man as loving him, seeking his good, and especially in view of man's

sinfulness, working for his salvation. We must not take the term out of the context in which Jesus here presented it, and then turn it against the reality in relation to which He declared it. The first and best gift of God's Fatherhood in the teaching of Jesus is His *forgiveness of sin.* God shows Himself Father most of all in seeking and saving the lost. We must not argue that because God is Father, and man has the likeness, and is in fellowship with God, therefore sin is of little significance, and can in no way affect man's relation to God. A Fatherhood of nature is not the revelation of Jesus, but a Fatherhood of grace. This statement must not, however, be misunderstood, as it has been by theologians standing at the opposite extreme of thought. While God's Fatherhood is a Fatherhood of grace, it is a universal Fatherhood; for God's disposition to all is love, and God's purpose for all is salvation. We need not here concern ourselves at all with the doctrine of election, for we are trying to state simply the plain teaching of Jesus, and the clear meaning of His

life. He claimed to express the will of God concerning man, and He ever sought to save the lost. It seems an absolute distortion of the Christian Gospel to teach that Christ's work secures God's Fatherhood for those who believe, whereas it expresses that Fatherhood for all men in order that all may be brought to believe. The will of love to save and bless is an eternal and infinite will; and Christ reveals what God is, and does not make God other than He is. If we emphasise the fact that God's Fatherhood is essentially His will to save and bless mankind sinners, then we can both affirm that it is universal, and that the corresponding human relation to God of sonship is realised only by those who in faith respond to the grace. It is only if we put the abstract terms of logic above the concrete realities of life that we can insist, as I have heard some disputants do, either that man's sonship is as universal as God's Fatherhood, or that God's Fatherhood is limited as man's sonship. God wills to save and bless all men, but all men do not will to be so saved and blessed.

(2) The truth of God's Fatherhood has been widely challenged on the ground that the existence of evil disproves the reality of the love of God. The wider considerations, which in a philosophical treatment of the problem would be relevant, lie beyond the present scope of our inquiry; for we want to discover and then to share the reasons why Jesus believed and taught the Fatherhood. It was not because He was ignorant of, or indifferent to, human pain and need; it was not because He was unsympathetic to human sorrow; it was not because He minimised or explained away the reality of sin. If we realise His tenderness and kindness, we must be convinced that the problem of evil, and especially of sin, was felt by Him as no thinker, who on account of it has challenged the truth of God's love, ever felt it. He knew the whole reality that to some seems to make faith impossible, and He exercised an unwavering and conquering faith. His certainty of God's Fatherhood in face of the reality of evil and sin as He knew and felt it may inspire our confidence

that, if we cannot solve the problem, for Him at least it was not insoluble. It was because He concentrated His attention and interest and effort on the moral sin, rather than the physical evil, as many thinkers have done, that He foresaw the solution; for if sin can be conquered, evil can be removed. To Him the problem was first of all, and most of all, man's distrust of and disobedience to God: the core of the problem of evil to Him was that man was lost to God. But the tragedy of man's state assured Him of a blessed consummation. Because man's sin was God's loss, man's recovery was assured by God's love. For Jesus, God's Fatherhood was the constant, victorious will to save and bless. He did not affirm the love of God by denying the existence of evil; but the removal of the evil was the realisation of the love. Enduring the contradiction of sinners, sharing the shame, sorrow, and suffering of man's sin in His love for man, He not only taught God's Fatherhood, but lived it in His Sonship of trust, love, and obedience. His certainty is contagious, and the Father-

hood so real to Him, He, when He casts the spell of His grace over us, makes as real to us. But this is not all; the Fatherhood was being revealed in not only the realisation of His Sonship in Himself, but in the realisation of His Saviourhood to others. He was "the friend of publicans and sinners," because the Son of Man was indeed seeking and saving the lost. The problem of evil was for Him soluble, because He was Himself solving it. It was in that hour, when the burden of the problem fell most heavily upon His own heart, that He maintained His assurance of Saviourhood, the fulfilment through Him of God's will of love towards all mankind. Jesus' teaching of God's Fatherhood would not have for us the value that it has, had He not realised the evil and the sin of the world to the uttermost in His own loving heart; it could not amid doubt and question maintain our certainty, had He not in His Saviourhood shown the victory of God's love over sin and evil.

III.

WHAT IS MAN?

CHAPTER III.

WHAT IS MAN?

"And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living."—LUKE XV. 12 (A.V.).

"And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of *thy* (marg. Gr. *the*) substance that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living."—(R.V.)

THE custom that is in this verse alluded to is so foreign to our views about property that it is difficult for us to realise how a son could make such a request, or a father grant it; and yet Jesus would have blunted the edge of His comparison if He had introduced details into the story that would have challenged the contradiction of His hearers. But according to Eastern ideas, the father holds the family property in trust for his children, and he may divest himself of that

property in their interest This case does offer us some suggestions regarding the nature of man additional to those already suggested by the discussion of the nature of God. We have already seen that as God is manlike, so man is godlike ; there is a likeness of nature between God and man. We have also seen that God is Father as the will to save and bless mankind, and so man may become the child of God in accepting that salvation and blessedness. This verse suggests three thoughts that will bring out more clearly the relation of God and man, and man's need of the saving love of God. (1) *Man is dependent on God* : the son has no property of his own, but must ask that the father may give. (2) *Man asserts himself even in relation to God* : the son seeks to be independent by gaining control over his portion. (3) *God assents to man's liberty* : the father divided unto them his living. The analogy between God's relation to man and the relation of an earthly father to his son is close enough to preserve these suggestions from arbitrariness.

What is Man?

1. Man is Dependent on God.

(1) In all religion there is a sense of dependence on the divine; one of the world's best teachers, Schleiermacher, defined religion as *the feeling of dependence*. Man finds himself in a world the laws of which he does not fully know, and the forces of which he cannot fully control, and yet on that world he depends for food and clothing, shelter and safety, health and strength, and so weal or woe. He depends on powers above him and above the world to secure good, and to avert evil from him. Jesus in His teaching confirms this witness of pagan religion regarding man's dependence. He declares the impartial beneficence of God's universal providence, and requires of man freedom from anxiety through confidence in God (Matt. vi. 25–34).

(2) Man's dependence appears even in his distrust of and disobedience to God. The younger son must get his portion from his father before he can use it according to his own wishes. The mind that thinks falsehood,

the heart that feels hate, the will that chooses wrong, the whole personality that is evil, owes all to God except its abuse of all His gifts. It is true that that dependence is often forgotten, and men act as if they were their own makers and so masters ; but man's forgetfulness does not alter the fact that it is from God that the portion so abused comes to them.

2. Man Asserts Himself even in Relation to God.

(1) There is a tendency in man towards self-assertion; he has an individuality that he seeks to realise ; the impulse to self-preservation, self-protection, self-advancement, and self-satisfaction is natural and necessary to man ; he feels himself to be an end in himself, and he uses the world and his fellow-men as means towards that end. Within its proper limits this movement in man towards individual independence is salutary. Self-development is a necessary characteristic of personality ; man makes himself and is not merely made. Foolish parents sometimes speak about breaking the will of their

children, and, if they should succeed in so doing, it would be the worst injury they could inflict upon them. Self-will is an evil; but self-control is good; the one is the abuse, the other the condition of human individuality. It is not at all desirable that any man should lose his sense of individuality, and should, chameleon-like, become simply the reflection of his environment. What gives interest to life is the variety of experience and character; what makes men and women mutually helpful is that they are severally different. As has been said, it takes all sorts of men to make a world. It is right that every man should seek to be himself, to develop his own individuality, instead of being a mere copy of his parents, teachers, or companions. That man should seek control over his own portion of goods is both natural and necessary.

(2) In his self-development there is an alternative before him; he is midway between the beast and the angel; the animal appetites on the one hand clamour, the spiritual ideals on the other hand call. As

he yields to the one or the other is his realisation of himself for evil or for good; he sinks to the beast, or soars to the angel; and the possibility of the angel in him refused makes the reality of the beast the more beastly. The beast's appetites are limited by instinct; the man's appetites are increased by the promise and potency of being more than the beast. There is one effect of this choice that must here be especially emphasised. As a man yields to appetite, his self isolates itself from and opposes itself to other selves; his self-development is more and more characterised by self-will, regardless of and antagonistic to other wills. But if on the contrary he surrenders himself to his ideals, the self enters into ever wider relations with other selves; his self-control is a co-operation with other wills for common ends. Whether then man's will to be himself, which is both natural and necessary, shall be self-will isolating from others, or self-control, relating to others, depends on his choice of the appetites or the ideals as the ends of his

self-realisation. It is in the will to be himself, and the possibility of the choice of appetite, and the assertion of self-will that the source in man of sin must be recognised.

(3) This self-assertion is not limited to man's social relations, his intercourse with his fellow-man; he has the religious relation to God; even in the lowest stages of human development there is some consciousness of the divine, and of dependence on and obligation to the divine. Man's self-will, therefore, isolates him from and opposes him to God as well as man. Absolutely dependent on God, and unable to divest himself entirely of his sense of dependence, he may yet assert his self-will even against the will of God. He may distrust and disobey what he acknowledges to be his God. While in practice the fool says in his heart, There is no God, for he acts as though God's moral authority were non-existent for him, it is but seldom that in theory he goes on to deny the divine existence. Practical atheism is much more common than theoretical; and many a

man who is clearly guilty of the former would be filled with indignation if he were charged with the latter; but it is important that this consideration should be pressed, that self-will is practical atheism. God calls in the ideals, and to realise the ideals is to maintain our dependence on Him; whereas to yield to our appetites is to distrust and disobey Him on whom we must depend in all things. There are some who making man altogether master of himself take the next step and deny that there is any God on whom he depends. So natural to man is the impulse to religion, the recognition of the divine, that it is not unjust to argue that the theoretical atheism results from the practical in the history of the race, although, of course, we must be on our guard in ascribing to any individual to-day intellectual difficulties about the existence of God to moral defiance of the authority of God. Yet much may be said in support of the contention that it is as men disobey God in their ways that they seek to forget God in their thoughts. In his career of vice the

prodigal thought as little of his father as he could; it was only when he came to himself that he bethought him of his father's house. Man, though dependent on God, has the power to assert himself in the gratification of his appetites, not only against his fellow-men, but even against God Himself; and as he so asserts himself his consciousness of God grows less distinct, and so the restraints which that consciousness imposes become less potent; and it becomes possible for the creature to distrust and disobey, and at last to ignore and deny the Creator. But it may well be asked, How does God permit such a development of his creature?

3. God Assents to Man's Liberty.

(1) The father in the parable complied with the younger son's request, though it would not be hidden from his insight what use the son wanted to make of his portion, or from his foresight what the issue of such an abuse of his inheritance would be. God has chosen to give man liberty, even

although that liberty is abused in distrust of and disobedience to Himself. What is the reason ? *Firstly*, men are not merely creatures of God to be controlled by His omnipotence ; they are made in God's likeness and for God's fellowship as children ; and so they must be controlled through their own voluntary obedience to God's moral authority. There can be the relation of creator and creature without freedom ; but there cannot be the relation of father and child. Love cannot be forced ; obedience cannot be compelled. God desiring to gather around Him a loving family endowed mankind with freedom. But freedom is not real where there is no choice ; there must be possibility of evil as well as of good where there is liberty. The will that can obey must also be able to defy ; the heart that can trust and love must also be capable of distrust and estrangement. Hence even divine omnipotence could not create a child of God who could not become a sinner against God.

(2) But if that is granted, the further objec-

tion may be urged. Did not God forsee what the abuse of human liberty would be ; and should not the vision of all the evil to be have restrained the creative hand of God ? In answer to this question two considerations may be offered. *First of all*, it is by no means so certain that God does foresee free action. Until the choice is made, two possibilities are open ; and God does foresee the two possibilities. To affirm that He also foresees which of the two shall be chosen is surely to contradict the fact of the possibility of both. God's foreknowledge of the choice made would surely limit man's freedom in making. This line of thought is suggested not as a solution of the problem, but rather as an indication of the contradiction in which we must involve ourselves as soon as we go beyond the limits set to our intelligence, and begin making confident assertions as to what God does or does not foreknow.

Secondly, had God abstained from creating, evil would have defeated God before it ever came to actuality. But it

may be urged, Whenever the evil choice was made, why did God not withdraw the abused gift? The answer is twofold. *First*, God's end of a loving family of God is so absolutely good that, as God willed it at any risk, He will pursue it at any cost. Better far a world redeemed from sin than no world at all. *Secondly*, God's continuance of the race in spite of its sin is surely the guarantee that His resources are such that He can overrule the sin of man for His glory, and can bring greater good out of all the evil of the world. Is there not even a hint in the parable itself that the son who left home for the far country was more completely recovered for the father's heart than the elder brother who remained at home? Sin is sin, and only evil; but, nevertheless, God can by His grace so conquer sin that the joy of the recovery of the lost is greater than it would have been had there been no loss and no recovery.

IV

WHAT IS SIN?

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT IS SIN?

"And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there he wasted his substance with riotous living."—LUKE XV. 13.

IN dealing with the nature of man in the previous section, it was impossible to avoid altogether some anticipation of what has to be said here about the nature of sin; but the endeavour was made to confine the treatment there to the possibility in man of sinning. Now we are to fix our attention rather on the actuality of sin; but, as we are being guided by the story before us, we must consider only those aspects of sin which it suggests. These are three: (1) *There is abuse of God's gifts;* "not many days after, the younger son gathered all

together." (2) *There is absence from God;* "and took his journey into a far country." (3) *There is abandonment of God's purpose;* "and there wasted his substance with riotous living."

1. There is Abuse of God's Gifts.

What is the tragedy and the crime of sin is that it is God's goodness alone which makes sin possible; it is man's dignity as made in the likeness, and for the fellowship of God which is both the occasion and the measure of his degradation. The stars move in their courses with unchanging order, subject to unvarying laws; even the lower animals are guided by instinct, and are kept within the bounds of their being. But man turns his glory into his shame. Had man not a mind that could think truth he could not devise falsehood; had he not a heart that could delight in God he could not find pleasure in evil; had he not a will that could choose the right he could not prefer the wrong. We must ever look at sin in the light of what God has made man, and meant

man to be. Where there is the actuality of falsehood, hate, and iniquity, there is also the possibility of truth and love and righteousness. The very same faculties which abused make man beastly and selfish, would, if exercised according to God's will, make him angelic and godlike. We must measure the depth to which man sinks by the height to which he may soar. The standard by which the abuse of manhood which sin involves must ever be measured is the character of Christ Himself. In this we see the Father's gifts of mind and heart and will ever exercised according to the Father's will in truth, love, and holiness for the Father's glory. On the one hand we see mankind because of sin clothed with shame and scorn; but we see on the other hand Jesus crowned with glory and honour. It is not with some imagined primitive state of man that we are to compare man's actual condition; but with the possibility of his manhood, as it is realised perfectly in Jesus Christ. Accordingly it is only as we know Christ that we can know what sin

is, for we see in Him realised what God meant man to be, and thus we can measure how far short man has fallen in what he now is. The abuse of the best is surely the worst.

2. There is Absence from God.

(1) At home in the father's presence the prodigal could not have abused his father's gifts; he must put a distance between himself and his father that he might get licence for himself. Wickedness must ever lead to godlessness. Sin involves, and cannot but involve, *a spiritual separation from God.* It is true that no man can escape God's omnipresence; and there are times in the experience of the sinner when the presence of God is a terror to him, but, nevertheless, it is possible for a man to depart from and forget God. His mind can be so filled with falsehood that it has no room for truth; his heart may be so possessed with hate that love cannot there make its habitation; his will may be so controlled by evil that good may lose all sovereignty over it; the

appetites may expel all the ideals and the aspirations. If the thought of God does and will obtrude itself in memories of better days of childhood's innocence, or in pleadings and warnings of present human love, then as God's existence cannot be denied, His love is distrusted, and His claim is defied. Paul in his doctrine of human depravity in Romans i. and ii. makes godlessness the cause of wickedness, and not wickedness the cause of godlessness; and sees even in wickedness the divine penalty on godlessness: and Jesus here follows the same course; before the prodigal wastes his substance, he goes into the far country. It is probable that wickedness and godlessness act and react. It is as the consciousness of God becomes obscure, that the conscience of evil becomes indistinct; it is as men banish God from their thoughts, that they come under the power of the world and sin. It is probable that the grosser forms of immorality are possible only as the restraints of belief in God are cast off. Indulgence in sin involves distrust and defiance of God,

and the further the estrangement from God goes, the greater is the abandonment likely to be. If a man lives, conscious of God's presence, responsive to God's appeal in conscience, receptive of God's grace through His Spirit, evil is excluded by the possession of mind and heart and will by good. If, however, the soul be empty of God, it will soon be filled with wickedness. Had the prodigal loved his father, he would not have asked for his portion. Had he not left home for the far country, he would not have wasted his substance in riotous living. We must not try to answer the question, whether godlessness or wickedness comes first; for each goes with and begets the other.

(2) It is important to-day to insist on this companionship; for there is an attempt to detach morality from religion, and to represent it as altogether independent of religion. There are, it is true, moral men who are irreligious; but then they accept the morality of a society which acknowledges the authority of God in conscience. The

real issue is not whether one man can be moral without religion; but whether, if religion died in a society, its morality would be as living. A morality based on necessary social relations might survive; but would the morality of a perfect ideal and a holy aspiration live on? But without pursuing this question further, we may insist on the practical consideration that sin and God are mutually exclusive; if a man chooses his own will, he disobeys and defies God's. If he thinks falsely he excludes God as truth; if he feels hate, he shuts out God as love; if he does wickedly he withstands God as righteousness. To be thus mentally, morally, and spiritually separated from God is a very serious and perilous condition. It is as fatal to the truest, best, and most blessed life of man, as it would be to a man's bodily life were he deprived of air for him to breathe, heat to warm him, or food to nourish him. Estrangement from God means the atrophy of the mind and the heart, the paralysis of the will. It is the disease and at last the death of his

spiritual nature; it is the defeat of his destiny unto a blessed and a glorious immortality, for it is in God alone man has eternal life.

We should not, however, be adequately interpreting the mind of Jesus if we did not insist that man's estrangement from God is not only his own, but also God's loss. As the father of the prodigal missed his son, so God feels the want of the trust and the love, the honour and the service of His children. Man's *absence from God* means for man the loss of the blessings love confers; but for God the loss of the blessedness of bestowing these gifts; and it is the father's rather than the son's loss on which Jesus lays stress in the parable.

3. There is Abandonment of God's Purpose.

(1) When the prodigal got into the far country, away from all the restraints of home, the passions and the appetites had then full and free sway, and all his wealth was squandered in their indulgence. This

descent of the soul into vice is effected in two ways by the departure from God. *Firstly*, man is made for God's fellowship with a hunger and thirst of the soul after God; and if he does not meet that need in God's companionship, there will be an insatiable craving for some other satisfaction. Man's appetites are so exaggerated in comparison with the lower animals', just because of the infinitude of the need which God alone can satisfy. Intemperance and sensuality go far beyond the satisfaction of a bodily need, because man is seeking through animal appetites to meet a want which can be met only through spiritual aspiration. Lust is perverted love; sensuality is inverted spirituality. *Secondly*, if man turns from God to the flesh, the restraints which the love of God would put on all satisfaction of the legitimate necessities of the body is removed; and it is the characteristic of the animal appetites in man that unless kept under rigid restraint by conscience, they become rebellious; and, when the lawful sovereignty of God

in the soul has been overthrown, even tyrannous. The man who seeks freedom by pleasing himself becomes enslaved to his own appetites; and there is imposed on him an ever-increasing bondage, which, making ever greater demands on him, brings ever less satisfaction to him.

(2) It would be incredible, did not human life abound in instances, how completely men waste their substance, wealth, health, home, happiness, character, and reputation with riotous living. In our own land we have but to think of the victims of intemperance to realise how low man will sink, if he refuses to soar, and allows himself to be mastered by the lust of sin instead of the love of God. We must, however, beware of the error that it is only in the indulgence of the animal appetites that the soul can be lost. Social morality rebukes such indulgence; its immediate consequences often produce a revulsion of feeling; and at least the soul is not allowed to rest in a false peace. There are sins of greed, pride, envy, which are more secret and subtle; and

for that very reason all the more dangerous. Jesus seems to have judged the condition of the publicans and sinners as more hopeful than the state of the Pharisees. It is, we must insist, not only the sin which arises from self-indulgence in its varied forms that is ruin to the soul. Avarice, Ambition, Vainglory, Hate—all these sins of the soul, having no relation to bodily needs at all, may be as destructive, if not even more destructive, of the love of God, and the fulfilment of the end of the life of man. In whatever way man abandons God's purpose of truth, holiness, and love, and follows the flesh, the world, or the self along the paths of his own devising, and not of God's appointing, he is sinning, and in sinning is abusing God's gifts, and is separating himself from the love of God.

V.

WHAT IS JUDGMENT?

CHAPTER V.

WHAT IS JUDGMENT?

"And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him."—LUKE XV. 14–16 (A.V.).

"And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that country; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have been filled with the husks (marg. Gr. *the pods of the carob tree*) that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him."—(R.V.)

WHEN the word Judgment is used in regard to sin, we are too prone to think of the future penalty of sin that God is expected to impose; and men are sometimes tempted to believe that they may by a timely repentance

avert that judgment. The use of the term may make the penalty of sin appear as arbitrary and uncertain as are often the sentences of the human law-court. Jesus in this parable makes the penalty follow inevitably on the offence; and it would be well if Christian preachers would lay stress on the fact that the consequences of sin are immediate and inevitable; their character is determined by the nature of the sin. The closeness of this connection Paul indicates when he states that "the wages of sin is death," or even more forcefully in the figure, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." While we should therefore insist that the penalty of sin is causally related to the sin, is its consequence; yet we must not abandon the term judgment; for that would be to substitute an impersonal nature for a living God; and in religion especially it is of primary importance to maintain the sense of personal relation, that man in sinning is distrusting and disobeying God, and that in suffering the consequences of his sin he is enduring the

judgment of God. What are the elements of God's judgment on sin that are suggested by the description of the prodigal's state? (1) There is *destitution*. "When he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want." (2) Next comes *degradation*. "And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine." (3) Lastly, there is nothing but *disappointment*. "And he would fain have been filled with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him."

1. Destitution.

(1) The *destitution* is inward and outward; there is the famine in the land, and there is the want because all has been spent. Without incurring the condemnation of allegorising we may venture to follow out the suggestion that the poverty which is the judgment of sin is not confined to material resources. Both the world around and the soul within are bankrupt because of sin. The world does not and cannot yield the

satisfaction to the soul that it once did ; and the soul is not rich enough in itself to provide its own satisfaction. It is a known fact that the field of animal appetite and sensual indulgence yields an ever-diminishing return, the longer the cultivation the less the fertility of that soil. The drunkard has less pleasure in his drinking, and the sensualist in his uncleanness, the longer he continues in the evil habit. Even less gross pleasures of sense do not increase in the satisfaction that they afford. The greater the use the smaller the return. For the pleasure-seeker the world appears more and more as a vain show, in which there is no enduring substance. How different is it in the culture of the higher interests : the pursuit of truth is ever more rewarding ; the effort for holiness is ever bringing a loftier aspiration and also a larger satisfaction. Love increases as it continues.

(2) But if the man who has lived for the lower pleasures turns from the world because " there is a famine in the land," does he find, or can he find, that his own mind is his king-

dom with resources greater than any that the world can offer? Assuredly not. He has spent his all; inwardly as well as outwardly he is in want. The capacities of the personality, which legitimately used in the cultivation of the higher interests would have been continuously developed for fuller use, improperly abused in the pursuit of the lower pleasures, deteriorate. The man cannot interest himself in thoughts of truth, or aims of goodness, who has squandered mind and will on self-indulgence, in devising and in providing the means of sensuous joy. Although the reaction is most evident in the gratification of animal appetites, yet in lesser degree whenever a man lives for ends unworthy of his manhood, the world gives him ever less return for all his labour, and he discovers that his own inner resources are diminishing. Could we expect it to be otherwise? This destitution is evidence that we are meant for something higher; for God has made us for Himself, and our hearts must be restless until they find their rest in Him. The child of God made with

the infinite need of God will find famine without and want within if he attempts to meet that need with any of the finite pleasures that sense or world can offer. And yet the famine and the want do not at once arrest the downward course of ever more fruitless endeavour to find self-satisfaction in self-indulgence.

2. Degradation.

The actions assigned to the prodigal in the parable indicate a twofold *degradation*. The Jew held aloof from the Gentile; and for a Jew to join himself in service to a Gentile was surely a degradation. But to be compelled to feed swine, the unclean animals, the use of which for food the law strictly prohibited, was to descend to a still lower depth. In terms of local sentiment this description puts before us a vivid picture of how man degrades himself when he yields to sin. There is not only servitude, but shameful servitude. When we look on the face of the drunkard or the sensualist, do we not see that degradation written in the very

face? Can there be a sight more pitiful than the grace of womanhood marked with the tokens of vice! And the change of outward form is but a sign of the change of inward condition. It would be incredible, did we not know it in reality, how polluted the conscience can become, how perverted the affections, how foul the imagination, how uncertain the reason, and how enslaved the will. How the victim of such a degradation often loathes himself, and yet he sees no way of escape. There are sins that do not thus mar the form, and do not thus lower all the powers; and yet in the measure in which any sin asserts itself and gains the dominion, there is a degradation. The avaricious man estimates all values of art, literature, or even morals and religion, in cash. A minister's worth, for instance, is fixed by the salary that he can command. The writer was some time ago in the midst of a community which was making almost indescribable material progress; and he was being constantly shocked by the almost universal habit of estimating all values by

dollars. To the ambitious man, love and friendship even are only the means of self-advancement. The whole man and his whole world are dragged down into the servitude of his tyrannous passion. Again it is man's dignity that measures his degradation. A being of less capacity for progress would be less capable of decadence; the possibility of the rise is the measure of the actuality of the fall. It is the sense of *the might-have-been* that is the source of the misery and shame of *that-which-is*. It is the memory of the father's house that makes the far country such a degradation.

3. Disappointment.

(1) This degradation is unrelieved by any satisfaction which it might be endured to secure. The prodigal joined himself to a citizen of the country, and went out to feed swine, but he did not thereby escape either the famine or the want. What he asked was not given to him. Even in the destitution and the degradation there are desires

and expectations that, if the best gift cannot any longer be gained, yet the worst need may be escaped; still even this limited anticipation is *disappointed.* "No man gave unto him." The penalty of self-indulgence is unquenched and unquenchable desire; even although the soul would satisfy itself with the lowest forms of pleasure, it fails to find that satisfaction. The companions in sin do not accept the partnership of misery, if they can avoid it. Those on whom the portion has been squandered do not offer their help in the time of need. When Judas came to the priests with "the price of blood" they had no care or comfort for him. "What is that to us? see thou to that!" The sinner soon discovers the heartless cruelty of sinners. The tool is cast away as soon as its work is done. God has been distrusted and disobeyed that the world, the flesh, the self might be satisfied; but that satisfaction has been denied; less and less becomes the claim on life for any good; but so long as the soul remains in the far country, even the

smallest claim is unheeded. "No man gave unto him."

(2) This destitution, degradation, and disappointment were the beginning of the *return*. The punishment of sin by God is not merely vindictive; it is primarily remedial. Man is allowed to suffer to the uttermost the bitterness of his sin that there may be awakened in him the desire for escape and recovery. The sinner in the most hopeless condition is he who is not reaping as he has sowed. There is a cunning worldly prudence which seems to be able in this life at least to evade the consequences of sin. Some wicked men do appear to prosper in this world. But their lot is not to be envied. Better the crushing grasp of God's judgment which shows He will not let the sinner go, than the loss of even the sense of God in His judgments. The parable does not, and as a story could not, indicate an aspect of the divine judgment on sin that belongs to the complete revelation and redemption in Christ. The father in the parable remains at home waiting the prodigal's

return; but we have learned in Christ that the father is with his sinful son in the far country sharing his misery and shame as his very own. God's judgment on sin is expressed not most clearly or fully in what the prodigal suffers, but in the sorrow of the father. The two companion parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin supply an element of truth that is lacking in this story. The shepherd follows the lost sheep, and the woman goes to where the lost coin is. God in Jesus Christ comes into these very conditions of suffering, sorrow, and shame that sin has brought upon mankind, and in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ shares them fully. In that sacrifice there is presented to the human conscience a fuller and clearer judgment on sin than in all the misery and ruin that sinners may bring upon themselves. The contemplation of that sacrifice, the discovery that it was man's sin which brought such sorrow to God, does more to bring man to the broken and the contrite heart than all the woe that sinful men experience as a result of their sin. If God wills that men

should so suffer for sin, being love, could He refrain from sharing that suffering; and if He shares it, can anything else so adequately express His judgment upon sin? In view of the fact that in the Christian experience it is the Cross of Christ which makes a more potent appeal for penitence than all the consequences of sin experienced by the individual or exhibited in the history of the race, is it not folly, if not worse, to maintain that, because this parable does not mention an atoning sacrifice, therefore the saving death does not necessarily belong to the Gospel of Jesus? Is it not much more likely that truth cannot be completely embodied in a tale, than that the most intense and serious Christian experience should be under a delusion in maintaining that we are redeemed by the precious blood of God's own Son?

VI.

WHAT IS PENITENCE?

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT IS PENITENCE?

"And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father."—LUKE xv. 17–20 (A.V.).

"But when he came to himself he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father."—(R.V.)

As has been indicated in the previous section, the end of God's judgment is not the destruction of the sinner, but the separation of the sinner from his sin that he may return

to God. This reconciliation to God is effected by penitence on man's side, and pardon on God's. We must first of all consider penitence, as it comes first in the order of the tale, which, however, in this respect corresponds rather to the Old Testament revelation than to that of the New Testament. Here, as in the 51st Psalm, the initiative seems to be with man, and not with God. The Psalmist believes that if he will bring the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart God will accept it, and will forgive his sin; so the prodigal here resolves to return and make his appeal for pardon in the hope that the appeal will not be vain. But in the Christian redemption the initiative lies with God; it is He who in Christ offers His pardon unto men, and so appeals for their penitence. When pardon is granted on penitence, there is the assurance that the sinner has judged his own sin; and therefore God's pardon will not be misunderstood as making light of his sin. But when pardon is offered to penitence, a twofold problem arises. *First of*

all, it must be made clear that God does not so freely pardon sin, because He thinks lightly of sin; but that in forgiving the sin He has already judged it. *Secondly*, the penitence, to which the pardon is offered, must be awakened in the soul of man, lest the pardon be welcomed as a substitute for, instead of as the source of, penitence, even as in Ancient Israel the animal sacrifices were offered not as a token but in the place of repentance and amendment. This two-fold problem Christian faith finds solved in the Cross of Jesus Christ, even although Christian theology ever seems to fail adequately to express for the mind the relation. The sacrifice of God in Christ's Cross expresses God's judgment as well as forgiveness, and evokes repentance as well as faith in man. We must remember then that this parable was spoken before the sacrifice revealed God's pardon to call forth man's penitence; and must not be surprised that, spoken to Jewish opponents, it does not betray to their unfriendly scrutiny the secrets of Christian faith, but is presented

from the standpoint of the Old Testament, where pardon waited on penitence.

Although the term penitence, derived from the Latin, suggests mainly grieved feeling, and the Greek word *metanoia*, used in the Greek Testament, changed mind, yet penitence, as suggested by the words "He came unto himself," involves and affects the whole self, mind, heart, and will alike; and we must try to understand what in each of these exercises of the personality it means. (1) It is *first of all* for the mind *self-discovery*. "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" (2) It is next for the heart *self-disgust*. "I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." (3) It is lastly for the will *self-denial*. "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee." It involves a division within the man in order to recover harmony. The self to which the man comes is the higher self, which hitherto has been silenced

and suppressed; but now asserts itself, and delivers judgment on the lower self which has so long usurped the rule in the personality; the higher self discovers the sin and the shame of the lower, is disgusted with its degradation and disgrace, and denies its desires and impulses in the resolve to return to God with the confession of sin. As the higher self corresponds to the man as God made him, and meant him to be, this enlightening, quickening, and turning of the higher self against the lower cannot be more fitly described than in the words, "He came unto himself."

1. Self-Discovery.

The shame, misery, and want of the prodigal aroused his reason; he began to compare himself as he was in the far country with what he might have been at home. The servants have fulness of bread, the son is in want of it. Thus he begins to realise the penalty of his sin, and thereby to recognise its guilt. It is just here that the penitence of many men begins. They find out that

sin does not pay in the long run, that the game is not worth the candle, that the wages of sin are so bad that its gifts are not worth having. This may not be a very high motive to begin with ; but still prudence is better than imprudence, and wisdom than folly. It is better for a man to feel that he has been playing the fool than to be content to sink lower and lower towards perdition. For reason with its louder call may so far still the clamour of passion as to allow the " still small " voice of conscience to be heard. The prodigal discovered himself to be far more miserable than he need have been ; but he also confessed himself to be much more guilty. He admitted to himself that it was not his own bad luck, or the fault of his father, or the ill-treatment of others that had brought him to this pass ; but he blamed himself. Nothing can be made of a man until his self-discovery has gone so far that he sees himself not only as miserable but as blameworthy, as undeserving of the gifts of God, the want of which now makes him feel so miserable. As long, for instance,

as a drunkard blames the drink, or the publican, or his boon-companions, and excuses himself, he is not penitent. He must come to his conscience to be self-condemned before the process of conversion in him has really effectually begun. This self-discovery may come in different ways. It is not always by realising the misery that a man recognises the guilt of sin. One who was used to turn multitudes from sin to God discovered the imperfection of what to others appeared his spotless life when he realised the glory of Christ's moral perfection. Giuseppe Caponsacchi saw himself as the priest who was shaming his calling when he saw the depths of agony in the eyes of Pompilia (*The Ring and the Book*).

"We are sunk enough here, God knows,
But not quite so sunk that moments,
Sure though seldom, are denied us,
When the spirit's true endowments
Stand out clearly from its false ones,
And apprise us, if pursuing
On the right way, or the wrong way,
To its triumph or undoing."

BROWNING, *Cristina.*

2. Self-Disgust.

As the prodigal thinks of himself, so he feels about himself. We may imagine that a youth like this when in his home had looked down on the hired servants with contempt, or at least indifference; he expresses his own self-contempt by now placing himself on a level with them. By this comparison on the lips of the prodigal Jesus did surely mean to express the self-disgust that is the next step in repentance. Nay, that self-disgust goes deeper than the comparison to the hired servants. There is a difference between him and them, and it is to their advantage. It is only by an act of the father's grace that he can think of himself as being put even in the place of the hired servants. Reason and conscience, when they thus discover the sinner to himself, cannot but arouse this emotion of self-disgust, of humiliation. The man who knows himself both miserable and guilty cannot be pleased with himself, but must feel heartily ashamed of himself. It is true that the

emotional capacity of men varies, as does also the expression of their emotions. Some men cannot feel deeply; and others show least what they feel most. We must, therefore, not attempt to lay down any rule as regards either the intensity of the emotion, or the vigour of its expression, as a condition of the reality of the penitence. This alone must be insisted on, that as long as a man feels quite happy, or comfortable, he is not penitent. There must be some pain and grief at sin before penitence is complete; for it is through the emotions that reason and conscience move the will; and it is by an act of will alone that penitence so places a man before God that he can receive God's pardon. If the self-discovery and the self-disgust do not lead to the resolve of self-denial, the man is pictured for us in the words of James, "If any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass, for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." Such a beginning of penitence only hardens

the heart the more the oftener it is repeated.

3. Self-Denial.

Self-discovery and self-disgust lead the prodigal to the self-denial of the resolve to forsake the far country, to return home, to humble himself by confessing his sin, and submitting himself entirely to his father's will. Such a resolve involved the self-denial of the lusts that had taken him to the far country, of the wilfulness that had made the father's rule irksome, of the pride of independence, and the shame that kept him from return. The lower self in all its desires and impulses had to be denied that the higher self might be recovered. Genuine and effective penitence must always involve such self-denial. Not only the practice of, but all desire for, and delight in sin must be abandoned. The exercise of the will regardless of restraint of law or constraint of love must be given up. The authority of God, even should He at first appear to impose restrictions and obligations

as of servitude to Him rather than of liberty with Him, must be accepted. The darling sin must be surrendered; the strongest temptation must be resisted; the greatest sacrifice, if need be, must be effected. For the practical purpose of this exposition we need not make any elaborate distinction here between repentance and conversion. The one is the negative, the other the positive aspect of the one process; repentance is the separation of the sinner from his sin, and conversion is the return of the sinner to his God. The Latin word *pœnitentia* indicates the grief of the heart; the Greek word *μετανοία* the change of the mind, and the word conversion points to the decisive act of the will, a turning right round, away from the far country, back to the home. The story represents this decisive act as accomplished by the unaided human will; but in the reality of Christian experience there is what has been called the *prevenient grace* of God. God anticipates man's return to Him by the proclamation of the Gospel of His grace, and

by the working of His Spirit in the reason and the conscience. Repentance itself is an act of faith, receptive of, and responsive to, the seeking, pleading, wooing love of God in Jesus Christ. On man's part it is an activity, the exercise of the mind, heart, and will, as has already been indicated in self-discovery, self-disgust, and self-denial; but it is, and must ever be, a receptive rather than an originative activity; for it is the pardon offered in Christ's Cross that in most men awakens the penitence by which they are crucified unto sin, and the confidence in which they live with Christ unto God. This parable shows us a waiting love of God; we must ever supplement its representation by the companion parables, that present to us the seeking love of God. With God there is ever the initiative of grace, and for men there is the receptivity and the response of submission to that grace in faith.

VII.

WHAT IS PARDON?

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT IS PARDON?

"But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."—LUKE xv. 20–24 (A.V.).

"But while he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him (Gr. *kissed him much*). And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son (marg. Some ancient authorities add *make me as one of thy hired servants*. See ver. 19). But the father said to his servants (marg. Gr. *bondservants*), Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring the fatted

calf, *and* kill it, and let us eat, and make merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."—(R.V.)

The son's return at once meets the father's welcome; the penitence is at once followed by the pardon. In the Christian revelation the pardon is offered that the penitence may be felt. But passing over this difference, what does the pardon as here described tell us of what forgiveness is? It suggests to us (1) *the motive*, (2) *the method*, and (3) *the measure of pardon*.

1. The Motive.

(1) The *motive* is compassion; it is love moved to pity; it is literally a *suffering with* the sinner. "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion." We have already seen how God's suffering with the sinner is shown in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, in which God in personal experience, as real to the Father God as to the Incarnate Son, "tastes death for every man," descends to the depths of

humiliation. We shall not be vainly imagining, if we think of the father in the sight of his son realising the misery and shame and want of the far country, and even think of him as ever with his son in that far country, wondering what his lot might be. The story itself gives the impression that the compassion began only when the prodigal was seen; even although it did not wait for the first words of penitence. But when we think of God we must never think of God's pity as waiting the first movements of penitence. For while penitence is the condition of the human experience of the saving love of God, it is not the source of the compassion in the heart of God. God is eternally and infinitely love, and we may dare to believe that even the sin of the most impenitent moves Him to pity, to seek and to save the lost. It is needful to dwell on this obvious truth, for many Christian minds; for there are some believers who have not taken into their souls the whole Christian revelation. It is sometimes said that God will forgive, if a man will

be sorry for, and turn from, his sins. It is a not uncommon error that the motive of God's pardon is man's penitence, that God Himself waits to be moved by man's emotion. But this is a misinterpretation of the character of God; man does not change God's disposition. All the motives of God's dealings lie within His own absolute perfection as love. What is the novelty of the Christian Gospel is just this, that God freely offers forgiveness as a motive of man's penitence; He seeks to save before man wants to be saved.

(2) It is desirable in preaching at times to lay stress on this, as there are anxious, timid souls, who seem to think that they must reach a certain degree of penitence before they can be assured of God's pardon. They seem to believe that by intense emotion they can and must change God's disposition. When they do not at once feel the joy of God's forgiveness, they begin to be afraid that they are not penitent enough, that they must be still more sorry than they are to move God to forgiveness. The motive of God's pardon,

it must be insisted, lies not in anything that man can feel or will, but in what God Himself is. The necessity for penitence lies in man, and not in God. If pardon be, as we shall next show, a restoration of man to his filial communion with God, it is essential that there be in man a judgment of his own sin corresponding to God's judgment of it. There can be fellowship only when there is likeness; if we are to be the children of God in trust and obedience, we must love what God loves, and hate what He hates. The measure in which we recover our filial communion with God does depend on the measure of the change of mind in us, God's estimate of sin becoming ours. As it is in Christ's Cross that the divine judgment on sin is most fully expressed, our penitence becomes adequate in the measure in which we are crucified with Christ.

2. The Method.

(1) The father ran, and fell on the prodigal's neck, and kissed him. Pardon is God's act fully to restore man to Himself.

It is not the cancelling of penalty primarily, although the changed relation to God will alter, if not the fact, yet the meaning and the aim, of even the immediate and inevitable consequences of sin. It is first of all and most of all *the recovery of communion between God and man.* The pardon is given before the confession is made; and the pardon so awakens the filial consciousness in the prodigal that while he still confesses his unworthiness, the thought of any other relation than that of son is banished from his mind. The prayer resolved on, "Make me as one of thy hired servants," is never uttered. The kiss made any such petition impossible; only at a distance from the father could any other position than that of son seem even tolerable. That man thinks, feels, and wills himself the child of God in thankfulness and trustfulness, love and surrender—this is what makes forgiveness; and anything else or less would not be what man needs, and what God bestows.

(2) We must not, on the other hand, limit

the effects of the fact of forgiveness, as is often done. It is sometimes said that all the results of sin must be borne, even by the penitent; the uttermost farthing of the physical, social, and moral consequences must be paid. This is not true; and God be praised that it is not true. God does not work a miracle of His omnipotence to detach a man from his sinful past so completely that none of the effects of that sin will continue. A saint may have a diseased body till death brings release; a man who has turned from his evil way may never quite recover his lost reputation with his fellow-men; the old temptations may still assail, the old habits may still seek to recover their grasp; and the removal of the marred character is often a slow and painful process, but, nevertheless, when a man's relation to God is changed, then all is changed, the man having himself become a new creature, the old things have passed away, and all things have become new. We are learning that courage and hope have an influence even on the physical condition;

suffering patiently borne is not so great an evil as when it is rebelliously endured. It is the shame of even Christian men that the converted evil-doer is not welcomed back to confidence and esteem. Sometimes there may be need of caution, as there are men sunk so low morally and religiously that they will pretend conversion for worldly ends; but generosity of judgment is one of God's own redemptive energies through men. With God upon his side, with the burden of his guilt lifted from his conscience, with the assurance of the sufficiency of God's grace, a man may enter on the moral struggle with the assurance of victory in the end. Whatever trials or sorrows or struggles remain, for the man forgiven all punishment has ceased, and he can make the chastisements of life the means of self-development in the likeness of the child of God. In forgiveness God gives man His companionship, through love makes man's life his own. That divine approach begins before man's return; for in Jesus Christ God has entered into the life of man, and

made the suffering, sorrow, and shame of man's sin His own sacrifice. By the self-identification of love God in Christ has taken our place, and it is His fellowship in the sacrifice with us that evokes the penitence and faith which result in our salvation in our fellowship with Him. Personal union of God and man—that is how God forgives.

3. The Measure.

(1) How far does that personal union go? The language of the parable is borrowed from Eastern custom; but it makes plain the truth that God restores the penitent and pardoned not only to their full sonship, but, as it would even seem, to a sonship more glorious and blessed even than would have been possible had there been no interruption of the fellowship. This is the paradox of Christian experience, which we must state carefully to avoid error, but which we cannot leave unexpressed lest we should conceal the truth. On the one hand, we must hold that sin is evil, and evil only, and that it is not, and was not meant to be,

the means of higher good. A phrase like Augustine's *felix culpa* may be "procuress to the lords of hell." But, on the other hand, we cannot ignore a saying like that of Jesus, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." The joy of recovery is in these parables represented as greater than could be the comfort of continued possession. Would the prodigal have ever enjoyed such bliss in the father's love, or have had such tokens of the father's joy, had he remained in the home? We cannot fail to ask ourselves such a question. It is not wise or right, however, to turn such a suggestion into a dogma, and to assert that a world without evil would have been the poorer, because lacking the good of the redemptive love of God, and a sinless humanity less blessed because without the joy of being forgiven.

(2) Without pursuing this thought any further, we may insist that when God pardons He pardons to the uttermost, and

all the perfection, glory, and blessedness of the child of God is freely given to the saved sinner. In human experience, however, God's grace is conditioned, and so limited by man's faith. A man has as much good out of God's pardon as he is willing and able to possess. In the parable the prodigal gets all the blessing of forgiveness at once; but in human experience generally the full possession comes very slowly. Sometimes even in the father's house the spirit of the hired servant survives; and obedience is rendered as service, and blessing is received as wages. A false humility sometimes refuses the full joy of salvation; and men continue in trembling anxiety for their souls, when they might have the full assurance of faith. This attitude, more common in former days than it is now, was due to failure to receive the revelation of God distinctive of Jesus Christ. Conceptions of God at a lower stage in the progress of revelation were allowed to obscure the glory of the Fatherhood made known in Jesus Christ. It is impossible to estimate

for how much torture and anguish of soul the doctrine of election, for instance, has been responsible ; how men and women have tormented themselves to find the proof of their election in *the assurance of faith*, and when they were sure of faith, how they struggled for *the faith of assurance* ; and so the process of salvation was made a labour and a heavy burden, and not a rest to the soul.

(3) Surely Jesus meant that men should accept fully what God offers freely ; penitence should reinforce and not hinder faith ; humility is the companion and not the rival of confidence. We should not be so sorry for our sins that we cannot be sure of our forgiveness ; for this is not a godly sorrow that bringeth life, but an ungodly that worketh death. Great as is our sense of our sinfulness, greater still should be our assurance of the divine forgiveness that cancels the sin. The prodigal surely forgot the far country, the swine, and the husks in the robe, the ring, the shoes, and the feast. The parable does not follow his career any further ; but from Christian

experience we can learn that the rapture of the new experience is sometimes followed, although it need not be, by depression, by a return of old temptations, doubts, and fears ; but it also teaches us that the life in the father's house, if only faith ever claims grace, can be one of ever closer fellowship with, of ever greater likeness to, the father, of a joy not less real, even if less intense, than the first moments of forgiveness. For God in His grace provides abundantly all that the renewed soul needs for fullest growth, and freest exercise. There is no grudging in God's as there is often in man's forgiveness. When He pardons, He pardons with overflowing love ; and the only measure of the pardon of God is the love of God, which is as measureless as His eternal and infinite Being.

VIII.

WHAT IS "RIGHTEOUSNESS"?

CHAPTER VIII.

WHAT IS "RIGHTEOUSNESS"?

"Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."—LUKE xv. 25–30 (A.V.).

"Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called to him one of the servants, and inquired what these things might be. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. But he was angry, and would not go in: and his father

came out, and intreated him. But he answered and said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, and I never transgressed a commandment of thine: and *yet* thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but when this thy son came, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou killedst for him the fatted calf."—(R.V.)

The title of the parable, *The Prodigal Son*, ignores the existence of, and so diverts our attention from, the elder brother. And yet, as has already been suggested, it is the picture of the elder brother which is more important for Jesus' purpose than the picture of the prodigal. Here we have the portrait of the Pharisee, the opponent of Jesus, the description of what was esteemed righteousness in the Jewish nation. When Jesus uses the term, as in the sayings, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners," He is not referring to such goodness as He could approve, but to what was generally esteemed goodness in His own age. Another portrait of the "righteous" pictured here in the elder brother is presented to us in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican.

There is the same conceit and the same censoriousness. The details of a parable are not to be pressed. It is appropriate that the father in the parable should say to the elder brother, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine"; but we must not understand that as a declaration by Jesus that the Pharisee had the proper communion with God, or was enjoying the full possession of the blessings of the right relation to God. The words may be taken, however, as a tender appeal to the "righteous," an assurance that for them also there was waiting the love of God with all its fulness of blessing as soon as they would be ready to welcome and receive it. In reality, the elder brother in Jesus' estimate was even further from the father's house and heart, and had less hope of return, than the prodigal in the far country, for Jesus regarded this "righteousness" as a greater barrier to salvation than "sin." We must then look more closely at the righteousness that hinders human penitence and divine forgiveness. *Conceit* and *censoriousness* are

its more evident features, but the root of these lies in the *calculation* of claims upon God.

1. Calculation.

(1) The prodigal thought of asking the father to make him one of the hired servants, but the father's forgiveness silenced that petition; but the elder brother is in feeling and aim represented as a hired servant. "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." There is no love of the father, no delight in doing his will, no thankfulness for his gifts, no trustfulness in his kindness, but only estranged desire and enforced obedience. The elder brother would have enjoyed himself with his companions, if he had dared to ask for the means. He would not have served, if he had not feared the results of transgression of the father's commandments. This is a fundamentally false relation between God and man; for it

misrepresents the character and the purpose of God. God is not merely Lawgiver, Ruler, Judge, and He does not desire first of all obedience, but faith, trust in His goodness and His grace. A false conception of God leads inevitably to a wrong relation to Him. Servitude is the characteristic of the life lived under the control of law and not the constraint of love. Evil desire is not destroyed by pure affection, but only restrained by fear of consequences. The companions are more than the father; and the kid would have been more prized than his companionship.

(2) This moral and religious peril is not confined to the days of Jesus on earth. Even within Christendom there is the constant peril of a lapse into this attitude; God's favour is to be won by the merit of good works. In Roman Catholicism the evangelical conception has been displaced by the legal; but even in Protestantism the Old Testament standpoint has sometimes been taken instead of the outlook of the New Testament. Take Scottish

Sabbatarianism as an instance; how much more of the legal than the evangelical conception and relation! Conceit and censoriousness as marks of Pharisaism are the more obvious, but they are only secondary symptoms; the primary disease is that God is conceived as law, and not as love, and men put conformity to law for the surrender to love.

2. Conceit.

If God be conceived as law and not as love, a limit can be set to His claim on the soul; and accordingly there can be the *conceit* of conformity to His law. The elder brother was sure that he had served these many years, and that he had never transgressed, and he believed himself to be entitled to some favour and reward. Such *conceit* is the barrier, it is evident, to real moral progress. When a man believes the claim of law to be limited to certain commandments, when he persuades himself that he has not transgressed any of these commandments, his moral course will have

reached its goal. For him the moral life is a finite satisfaction, and not an infinite aspiration. There can be no moral progress unless man is conscious of an infinite ideal of moral perfection in God which it is his life in God ever to be realising. If he has this infinite aspiration, he will have an inexhaustible inspiration of ever loftier purpose and more heroic endeavour. This satisfaction is possible only when the law is regarded as external commandment; for conformity to law in outward act does not appear a "forlorn hope." But whenever the inwardness of morality is recognised, as it was by Paul, to judge from his confession in Romans vii. 7 that it was the commandment "Thou shalt not lust" which morally slew him, then the impossibility of conforming every thought, feeling, desire to the law's requirements is also realised. It is only a law of limited and external obligation which can encourage the conceit that it has not been transgressed, and such a law would be a condition of moral stagnation, and not of progress.

3. Censoriousness.

(1) The man who is satisfied with himself is very censorious to others. The Pharisees scorned the "sinners," who included not only the morally reprobate, and religiously indifferent, but also plain good people, whose circumstances did not allow them to maintain the Pharisaic strictness. They despised and condemned Jesus, because, professing to be a moral and religious teacher, He did not follow in their ways, but became the companion of the sinners. The elder brother in the parable illustrates this censoriousness. He thinks the worst, and he makes no allowances. Whether the riotous living in the far country included the harlots or not, the elder brother will make the case as black as he can. We know people who literally delight in iniquity; they have an unclean joy in describing the vices that they abstain from themselves; and seem to have a cruel satisfaction in bringing home the worst offences to others; they ever give free rein to their imagination

when their information does not go far enough for their malice. If they were truly moral, they would hate sin too much to find a pleasure in talking about it, they would care for their brother's good too much to endanger it by depriving him, even if guilty, of the compassion that might help his repentance. It is because their conformity to their limited external law has cost them so little, that they do not, and cannot, make allowances. They can compute only how much is committed, and not how much is resisted. Their judgment of others is false alike in what it ignores and what it exaggerates.

(2) The true "righteousness" recognises the illimitable claim of God because it trusts in His inexhaustible love; it thinks not of a fixed number of outward commandments to be obeyed; but of a life inspired by grateful love to be fully surrendered to the generous love of God. It is not law that compels, but love that constrains. As the claim of love is absolute, there can never be the conceit of conformity to law; there is the humility that recog-

nises the insufficiency of the return that has been made for love, and there is the aspiration for fuller submission. With humility and aspiration there go charity and compassion. He who is ever conscious of falling short himself will not dare harshly to judge the failure of another. He knows how strong are the temptations, and how feeble the endeavours, of man. Sin in himself and in others he will judge, and with an ever more searching judgment; but as he hopes for God's pity, nay, in Christ is assured of it, he will be very pitiful to others. As it is by grace alone that he himself expects to be saved, he will seek to be a minister of grace to others. As he becomes truly more holy, he will become not less, but more pitiful, for his holiness is an ever closer fellowship with, and an ever greater likeness to the Holy Father, who loves and forgives. The prodigal who accepted the father's forgiveness, and responded to his love, was possessed of the true righteousness, if only in a germ needing further development; while the elder brother had only the false righteousness of the Pharisee.

IX.

WHAT IS BLESSEDNESS?

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT IS BLESSEDNESS?

"And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."—LUKE xv. 31, 32 (A.V.).

"And he said unto him, Son (marg. Gr. *Child*), thou art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine. But it was meet to make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive *again*; and *was* lost, and is found."—(R.V.)

THE judgment of the elder brother in the preceding section, although the context seems to compel us to regard it as Jesus' own judgment, has been challenged. There have been apologists for the elder brother. It is better, it has been urged, to be a respectable moral man than a prodigal. Better to keep the commandments, if only in the legal spirit, than to be recklessly wicked.

The Joy of Finding

1. The Blessedness Refused.

We may concede that it is morally better to be sober than drunken, chaste than lustful, honest than fraudulent; and in magnifying grace we must beware of minimising morality. But over against this admission we must put three considerations suggested by the teaching of Jesus Himself. *Firstly*, the elder brother would have liked to make merry with his companions, although he dared not ask for the kid. If a man be sober, chaste, and honest, because he fears to be otherwise, is he moral from the religious standpoint, whatever he may be from the social? Such conformity may have a relative, but it has not an absolute, value. *Secondly*, this kind of morality carries with it the grave defects of conceit and censoriousness. Can we regard a man as truly a good man, if he is pleased with himself, and is ready to find fault with others? The sins of outward deed are not the only sins; from the standpoint of social utility they may be the worst; but viewed in the

light of God's revelation of Himself as love is conceit or censoriousness to be lightly judged? *Thirdly*, Jesus at least seemed to believe that the prodigal's condition was less hopeless than the elder brother's. Note how abruptly the parable closes. We are not told what response the elder brother made to the father's tender and touching appeal. Had Jesus Himself had any hope for the Pharisees, should we not have had some hint? We know that in fact the appeal of the parable and all other appeals of Jesus were in vain. Sins such as the prodigal's bring their retribution, and sometimes lead to remorse, and even repentance. The Pharisee, because the world does not judge him, but even, it may be, admires his rectitude, does not judge himself; and so remains impenitent. The words in the thirty-first verse must be interpreted in the light of the words of verse twenty-nine. The elder brother might ever be with the father, but it was only as a servant with a servile spirit; all that the father had might be his, but he did not dare to ask for a kid. Surely the

verse expresses unrealised possibility, and unused opportunity. Neither was the father's companionship enjoyed, nor were his gifts used. The elder brother, whatever he appeared to be, was in reality self-exiled from the love and the blessing of his father, waiting for him, and pleading with him. Can hell be worse than the refusal of the love of God, and the blessedness it offers ? But we may gladly turn from the elder brother to dwell on the joy of the forgiving father and the forgiven son.

2. The Blessedness of Saving.

Gladness in the sinner's recovery is in accord with the nature of God. As the shepherd rejoices in the recovery of the lost sheep, and the woman in regaining her lost coin, and the human father in the return of his prodigal, so it is meet that God should rejoice in the salvation of man. It is because man has worth for God, that his recovery brings God joy ; and the worth of man lies not in what man is in himself, but in what God as love wills that man should

be. The man dead in sin may seem to have little worth; but God's love wills that he should be alive. Not what he is in the far country but what he may be in the father's house is the measure of his worth. About God's blessedness in saving we may ask two questions: (1) Is God's blessedness in the redeemed greater than it could have been in a world that needed no redemption? From this question we cannot escape, although we may feel the difficulty of the answer which it forces upon us. Love unto self-sacrifice in saving seems to us to have a value which love needing not to sacrifice cannot have. Answer the question how we may; of this at least we are sure, that the sorrow of God for man's sin issues in the blessedness of God in man's salvation. The Cross of Sorrow is transformed into the Crown of Blessedness. A God blessed in saving is a worthier conception even than a God blessed in His eternal perfection.

(2) But as we dwell on the bright sunshine of this thought there intrudes the dark shadow of the second question. Can that

blessedness be complete unless all are saved? Must not God's sorrow for the lost lessen His joy in the found? Must not the elder brother outside take from the father's pleasure in the restored son at the banquet? To that question we cannot now give the final or adequate answer; for we walk by faith, and not by sight; we see as through a glass darkly, and not yet face to face. But surely what we know of God as revealed in Jesus Christ gives us the assurance that the blessedness of the love of self-sacrifice shall yet be complete, although we know not when or how. For faith this is enough.

3. The Blessedness of Forgiveness Gained.

But we must think also of the joy of the prodigal in his return. The contrast between the far country and the father's house, between the death and the life, the loss and the recovery, must have filled his heart with exultant gladness. Could the blessedness have been as great without that contrast? Here again the same question

insistently pursues us. Is the joy of being saved greater than could be the satisfaction of not needing salvation? Be this as it may, the blessedness of the saved is not, and cannot be, entire oblivion of the past; nay, rather it is the transfiguration of the shadow of sin by the sunshine of God's forgiveness. For the sin forgiven is remembered only to magnify the grace of the forgiveness. The gratitude of man's love cannot forget the generosity of God's. The remembrance of the divine sacrifice by which salvation has come to man is the motive of the heavenly song of the redeemed. The new song they sing is: "Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood *men* of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation; and madest them *to be* unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth" (Rev. v. 9, 10). In the vision of the blessed in the midst of the throne there is "a Lamb as it had been slain." The sense of forgiveness is the strongest motive to holiness here,

and will not fail to be a spring of blessedness hereafter. This is truly the wonder of God's world, that the darkest tragedy has issued in the most splendid triumph, that the grace of God has so vanquished the power of sin that the saved find their blessedness in the experience of their salvation.

4. The Blessedness of Forgiveness Shared.

But the joy of the saved in their own salvation is not the fullest blessedness possible; there is even a better gift. It is the joy of blessing shared by others. We may fear sometimes that our joy may be marred by the remembrance of the unsaved, and surely we could not desire to escape that loss of joy by any selfish forgetfulness. But we may leave that doubt to the love that has given us such assurance of its will to save and bless, and may allow ourselves to be carried out of the narrow bounds of our own individual good into the full current of joy inspired by the confident expectation of a redeemed world. How significant the

words in the Epistle to the Hebrews (xi. 40), "God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." The joy of each believer perfected in the joy of the fellowship; the joy of all the generations of faith perfected in the glorious and blessed consummation, when the world's Redeemer shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied; when it shall be said, not of this or that one prodigal, but of all mankind, "Dead and now alive, lost and now found."

It was such a joy that the parable of Jesus invited the Pharisees to share; but they would not, even as the elder brother in the story would not go in. Is Jesus not to-day still inviting even men professedly Christian to an interest in the salvation of sinners, which by their indifference to the work of His grace in the world they are refusing? But those who accept His invitation, and share His solicitude for the lost, share, too, His satisfaction in their recovery. To be self-exiled from the joy of the world's salvation is hell, for it is to shut oneself out

of the love of God Himself; to be self-dedicated to that joy is heaven, for it is to enter into the life of God Himself, who as love sorrows in the lost, and has joy in the saved. The one unpardonable sin is surely to refuse the grace of pardon for oneself, and to be indifferent to the conquests of that grace in the world. Love rejected brings a worse condemnation than could law disobeyed. The throne of judgment is, not on Sinai, but on Calvary.

APPENDIX.

EXPLANATORY NOTES FROM—

1. *The Synoptic Gospels*, by BRUCE. The Expositor's Greek Testament.
2. *The Gospel according to St. Luke*, by PLUMMER. The International Critical Commentary.
3. *The Gospel of St. Luke*, by ADENEY. The Century Bible.

VERS. 11–32. "The Parable of the Prodigal Son. It completes the trilogy of these parables of grace, but we cannot be *sure* that it was uttered on the same occasion as the two other parables. The Evangelist separates it from them by making a fresh start: *Εἶπεν δέ* (comp. xxiv. 44). But this may mean no more than that Jesus, having justified Himself against the murmurings of the Pharisees, paused; and then began again with a parable which is a great

deal more than a reply to objections. Even if it was delivered on some other occasion unknown to Luke, he could not have given it a more happy position than this. The first two parables give the Divine side of grace: the seeking love of God. The third gives the human side: the rise and growth of repentance in the heart of the sinner. It has been called *Evangelium in Evangelio*, because of the number of gracious truths it illustrates. It has two parts, both of which appear to have special reference to the circumstances in which Luke places the parable. The younger son, who was lost and is found (11–24), resembles the publicans and sinners; and the elder son, who murmurs at the welcome given to the lost (25–32), resembles the Pharisees. In the wider application of the parable the younger son may represent the Gentiles, and the elder the Jews. Like the Lost Coin, it is peculiar to Luke, who would take special delight in recording a discourse which teaches so plainly that God's all-embracing love is independent of privileges of birth

and legal observances. Its literary beauty would be a further attraction to the Evangelist, who would appreciate the delicacy, picturesqueness, and truth of this description of human circumstances and emotions" (Plummer). "This most beautiful and precious of all the parables is only found in Luke. It enlarges on the lessons of the two previous parables, with the addition of many new features. Thus it is more like a complete allegory than any other of our Lord's parables. It is important not to lose sight of its main lesson—the joy of restoring the lost, as that lesson is paramount in all three parables. But other very important lessons are also evidently intended to be gathered from this richly significant story" (Adeney).

Ver. 12. "*give me the portion of thy substance that falleth to me.*"—"According to the Jewish law this would be half what the eldest received, *i.e.* one-third (Deut. xxi. 17); but had he any claim to it in his father's lifetime? Very possibly he had. We have here perhaps a survival of that condition

of society in which testaments 'took effect immediately on execution, were not secret, and were not revocable' (Maine, *Ancient Law*, ch. vi. p. 174, ed. 1861), and in which it was customary for a father, when his powers were failing, to abdicate and to surrender his property to his sons. In such cases the sons were bound to give the father maintenance; but the act of resignation was otherwise complete and irrevocable. Both in Semitic and in Aryan society this seems to have been the primitive method of succession, and the Mosaic Law makes no provision for the privileges of testatorship (*ibid.* p. 197). The son of Sirach warns his readers against being in a hurry to abdicate (Ecclus. xxxiii. 19–23), but he seems to assume that it will be done before death. We may say, then, that the younger son was not making an unheard-of claim. His father would abdicate some day in any case; he asks him to abdicate now" (Plummer). "It is said that 'in some provinces in India, as soon as the younger son reaches manhood, any of the sons can demand a division of the

property' (A. Wright, *St. Luke*, p. 139)" (Adeney). "*divided unto them.*"—"In justice to his elder son the father gives him his portion also, but living still at home he does not take it away. He and his father would now live as partners" (Adeney).

Ver. 14. "*famine.*"—"Such correspondences between the physical and moral worlds do occur, and there is a Providence in them" (Bruce).

Ver. 15. "*joined himself.*"—"The citizen of the far country did not want him, it is no time for employing superfluous hands, but he suffered the wretch to have his way in good-natured pity" (Bruce).

Ver. 16. "*have filled his belly,*" A.V.; "*have been filled,*" R.V. "There is no doubt that χορτασθῆναι (ℵ B D L R) is not a euphemism for γεμίσαι τὴν κοιλίαν αὐτοῦ (A P Q X Γ Δ), but the true reading: cupiebat saturari (d f) concupiscebat saturari (e); Syr—Sin. supports A" (Plummer). "*no man gave unto him.*"—"No one was giving him: this his experience from day to day and week to week. Giving

what? Not the pods, as many think —these he would take without leave—but anything better. His master gave him little —famine rations, and no other kind soul made up for the lack. Neither food nor love abounded in that country. So there was nothing for it but swine's food or semi-starvation" (Bruce). "Even this miserable food, so that the quantity which he got was small" (Plummer).

Ver. 17. "*he came to himself.*" — "This equals either, realising the situation; a coming to his true self, his sane mind. Perhaps both ideas are intended. He at last understood there was no hope for him there, and, reduced to despair, the human, the filial, the thought of home and father revived in the poor wretch" (Bruce). "*hired servants.*" — "Casual labourers, inferior to the slaves, as tramps hired by a farmer for harvesting are reckoned inferior to the men on the farm engaged from year to year" (Adeney).

Ver. 18. "*I will arise.*" — "A bright hope gives energy to the starving man; home!

Said, done; but the motive is not high. It is simply the last resource of a desperate man. He will go home and confess his fault, and so, he hopes, get at least a hireling's fare. Well to be brought out of that land, under home influences, by any motive. It is in the right direction. Yet though bread is as yet the supreme consideration, foretokens of true ethical repentance appear in the premeditated speech" (Bruce). "*against heaven.*"—"The word 'Heaven' was commonly used by the Jews for 'God.' The reality of the story is seen in keeping the idea of the father in human regions. Thus the penitent owns his sin against God first" (Adeney).

Ver. 20. "*while he was yet afar off,*" etc. —"The idea is that his father was looking for him and able to recognise him at a distance, even in rags. It illustrates God's attitude as 'waiting to be gracious'" (Adeney).

Ver. 21.—"He makes his confession exactly as he had planned it; but it is doubtful whether he makes his humiliating

request. The words *ποίησόν με ὡς*, κ.τ.λ., are here attested by ℵ, B, D, U, X; but almost all other MSS. and most Versions omit them. They may be taken from Ver. 19, and internal evidence is against them. Augustine says: '*Non addit quod in illa meditatione dixerat*, Fac me sicut unum de mercenariis tuis' (*Quaest. Evang.* ii. 33). He had not counted on his father's love and forgiveness when he decided to make this request; and now emotion prevents him from meeting his father's generosity with such a proposal" (Plummer). "The son repeats his premeditated speech, with or without the last clause; probably with it, as part of a well-conned lesson, repeated half mechanically, yet not insincerely—as if to say: I don't deserve this; I came at most expecting a hireling's treatment in food and otherwise; I should be ashamed to be anything higher" (Bruce).

Ver. 22. "*the best robe*."—"The word indicates a stately robe, such as was worn on ceremonial occasions." "*a ring*."—"Probably with a signet, giving some authority."

"*shoes*."—"Sandals, not worn by slaves, therefore showing he was free" (Adeney). "Robe—ring—shoes; all symbols of filial state" (Bruce).

Ver. 23. "*the fatted calf*."—"Prepared for some approaching feast. Was this to be the older son's wedding?" (Adeney).

Ver. 24. "*this my son*."—"The father formally calls him his son, partly by way of recognition, and partly to introduce him to the attendants in case they might not know him" (Bruce). "*dead*."—Ethically? or as good as dead? the latter more probable in a speech to slaves" (Bruce). "*lost*."—"His whereabouts unknown; one reason among others why there was no search, as in the case of the sheep and the coin" (Bruce).

Ver. 26. "*what these things might be*."—"Not contemptuous, 'What all this was about' (Farrar, C. G. T.), but with the puzzled air of a man in the dark and surprised" (Bruce).

Ver. 28. "*angry*."—"He had been working, and was irritable, perhaps because tired. Moreover, he was taken by surprise, and he

had not been consulted" (Adeney). "*intreated him.*"—As "the unwillingness to go in was a state which continued, the father's entreaties continue also. He treats both sons with equal tenderness" (Plummer). "The father goes out and presses him to come in, very properly; but why not send for him at once that he might stop working on the farm and join in the feasting and dancing on that glad day? Did they all fear that he would spoil the sport and act accordingly? The elder son has got a chance to complain, and he makes the most of it in his bitter speech to his father" (Bruce).

Ver. 29. "*serve.*"—"His view of his relation to his father is a servile one." "*never transgressed.*"—"The blind self-complacency of the Pharisee, trusting in his scrupulous observance of the letter of the Law, is here clearly expressed. This sentence alone is strong evidence that the elder brother represents the Pharisee rather than the Jewish nation as a whole, which could hardly be supposed to make so demon-

strably false a claim" (Plummer). "*a kid.*"—"Of less value than the fatted calf." "*with my friends.*"—"Not with his father. He has his own friends. Really, then, he too has drifted away from his father, though living in the home" (Adeney).

Ver. 30. "*this thy son.*"—"Contemptuous. 'This precious son of yours.' He will not say, 'My brother'" (Plummer). "*with harlots.*"—"Hard, merciless judgment; the worst said and in the coarsest way. How did he know? He did *not* know; had no information, jumped at conclusions. That the manner of his kind, who shirk work, and go away to enjoy themselves" (Bruce). "This is mere conjecture, thrown out partly in contrast to '*with my friends*' (who of course would be respectable), partly to make the worst of his brother's conduct. That it shows how *he* would have found enjoyment, had he broken loose, is not so clear" (Plummer).

Ver. 31. "*ever with me.*"—"'What he is enjoying for this one day *thou* hast *always* been able to command.' But like the

Pharisees, this elder son had not understood or appreciated his own privileges. Moreover, like the first labourers in the vineyard, he supposed that he was being wronged because others were treated with generosity" (Plummer). "*All that is mine is thine.*"—"If he wanted entertainments he could always have them: the property had been apportioned (ver. 12). Thus the first reproach is gently rebutted. So far from the elder son's service never having met with recognition, the recognition has been constant; so constant that he had failed to take note of it. The father now passes to the second reproach—the unfair recompense given to the prodigal. It is not a question of *recompense* at all: it is a question of *joy*. Can a family do otherwise than rejoice, when a lost member is restored to it?" (Plummer).

Ver. 32. "*meet.*"—"This joy is becoming. The music and dancing are not out of place. The penitent is not to be received with gloom, but with rejoicing" (Adeney). "*this thy brother.*"—"The substitution of ὁ ἀδελφός σου for ὁ υἱός μου, and the repeti-

tion of οὗτος clearly involve a rebuke; 'this thy brother, of whom thou thinkest so severely. If I have gained a son, thou hast gained a brother'" (Plummer).

Vers. 31, 32. — "The father answers meekly, apologetically, as if conscious that the elder son had some right to complain, and content to justify himself for celebrating the younger son's return with a feast; not a word of retaliation. This is natural in the story, and it also fits well into the aim of the parable, which is to illustrate the joy of finding the lost. It would serve no purpose in that connection to disparage the object of the lesser joy. There is peculiar joy over one sinner repenting even though the ninety-nine be truly righteous, and over a prodigal returned even though the elder brother be a most exemplary, blameless, dutiful son" (Bruce). "Not the least skilful touch in this exquisite parable is that it ends here. We are not told whether the elder brother at last went in and rejoiced with the rest. And we are not told how the younger one behaved after-

wards. Both those events were still in the future, and both agents were left free. One purpose of the parable was to induce the Pharisees to come in and claim their share of the Father's affection and of the heavenly joy. Another was to prove to the outcasts and sinners with what generous love they had been welcomed " (Plummer).

These brief extracts have been collected as a help to preachers desiring to preach upon this parable ; and indicate how inexhaustibly suggestive it is to different minds. For this reason the writer has allowed others, rather than himself, to speak in these Explanatory Notes.

"Cor nostrum inquietum est, donec requiescat in te."

"Da quod jubes, et jube quod vis."

"Deo servire vera libertas est."

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